

THE POWER OF TEN

**Mastering Calm and Control with Simple
Breathing and Mindfulness Methods**



GW COOK

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By
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*"When angry, count to ten before you speak; if very angry,
count to a hundred."*

— Thomas Jefferson



Introduction

‘Count to ten . . .’ do you remember those words from when you were a kid? I do, but until recently, I never realised how important and fundamental they are as a tool for self-help and personal development. The technique I am about to share with you is a simple concept and an effective tool for calming yourself down in times of stress, anger, and high emotions.

This simple technique is also effective in helping you make the best decisions possible during critical moments. Along with the ‘count to ten’ method, I’ve also provided other effective breathing techniques in this booklet for controlling anxiety, self-doubt, and inner turmoil.

In the chapters ahead, I’ll show you how to use this powerful tool (and other techniques) to improve your life. If followed precisely (it’s not hard, I promise) and practised regularly, you can use this tool to modify countless bad behaviours and habits you probably don’t need in your life.

I have found that the most useful application of these techniques is for controlling anxiety and negative thought patterns. If it can work for me, it can work for anyone.

Just like the ‘count to ten’ pearl of wisdom, many of us also carry around a whole array of not-so-positive learnings passed down from our parents and their parents before them. Negative phrases such as ‘dreams don’t pay the bills’ or ‘life’s not fair, so get used to it’ can lead to years of self-doubt and anxiety, and so it is that oft-repeated positive phrases can lead to valuable and life-changing results.

Understanding the power of these thoughts and where they come from is essential. Replacing negative beliefs with positive ones is central to personal development and moving forward in life.

The methods in this booklet will provide you with the tools you need to accomplish this worthwhile goal.

The ‘count to ten’ method isn’t the ‘be-all and end-all’ solution to life’s problems. What works for one person may not work for all people. However, I guarantee that you will see results if you have never tried this technique before and apply it to specific behaviours and thoughts you want to change in your daily life.

There is no link to a ten-day course, video training, or any upsell at the end of this booklet other than a link to my website, where you can find other useful self-development resources. If you find this booklet useful or helpful, I’d appreciate it if you could share it with your people. Who knows, it might just help change someone’s life for the better.

Important: If you suffer from severe anxiety or depression, I’d recommend contacting a psychologist or counsellor who is trained in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). I can’t recommend CBT enough to trauma survivors and those who suffer long-term depression and anxiety. Essentially, it helped save my life. If I’d known how effective it was, I would’ve found

a good psychotherapist and ticked up my credit card or sold possessions to pay for a solid round of CBT sessions as soon as I left high school. Isn't hindsight a great thing?

But seriously, if you haven't tried it before and can scrape together the money somehow, you have everything to gain and nothing to lose, in my opinion. The struggle is real, but so is the path to recovery. 🙏

Now, let's get on with learning about these miracle methods.

Are you ready? Let's begin . . . One, two, three, four, five . . .



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Chapter 1

Counting to Ten – The Miracle method

The science behind counting to ten

The act of counting to ten is more than just a childhood habit – it engages specific neural circuits that help regulate emotion. When you're stressed or angry, your brain's **amygdala** – the emotional centre or core – takes control, reducing activity in the **prefrontal cortex** (the part responsible for decision-making).

Counting allows you to pause, giving your prefrontal cortex time to catch up and regulate emotional responses.

According to a study from the University of California, “delaying a response by engaging in simple cognitive tasks like counting or breathing helps reduce immediate, impulsive reactions”.

This technique, known as **cognitive distancing**, helps you regain control by temporarily shifting your focus from the triggering situation to something neutral, such as counting.

This delay effectively allows the emotional intensity to subside and gives the person time to calm down and control their thoughts and emotions.

CBT Insight: delaying immediate reactions

In Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), **cognitive restructuring** is the practice of recognising and reframing irrational thoughts. Counting to ten is a basic form of cognitive restructuring.

By delaying your reaction, you create a moment to question your initial emotional response and reframe your thinking.

Aaron T. Beck, the ‘father of CBT’, states, “Cognitive restructuring works by breaking down irrational thoughts and allowing a more measured, rational response”.

Research in CBT has shown that this pause allows individuals to engage in rational thinking, avoiding impulsive reactions that may lead to regretful decisions.

Power Tip

Practice mindfulness as you count to ten. Focus on the numbers, your breathing, or sensations in your body. This added awareness will help ground you even further.

How to apply it in daily life:

1. **Recognise the trigger:** The first step is to recognise when you feel anxious or have heightened emotions.
 2. **Count to ten:** Pause, breathe in deeply and slowly exhale as you count to ten in those moments of heightened emotion. If the anger or anxiety does not subside, take another deep breath and slowly breathe out before you count to a hundred, as Thomas Jefferson recommended. Count aloud or in your mind at a steady and deliberate speed.
 3. **Breathe between counts:** Inhale deeply and exhale with each number to further calm your nervous system.
 4. **Reassess the situation:** Once you've completed the counting, reassess the situation with a clearer mind.
 5. **Repeat until calm:** Even if you feel better and more relaxed, use the method for another 5 minutes to allow your brain and body time to regulate. Make sure you pause between each set of counting/breathing
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Chapter 2

Mindfulness and Breathing – A Complement to Counting

Understanding relaxation techniques

Counting isn't the only way to slow down emotional responses. Breathing exercises are essential for regulating stress and anxiety.

Diaphragmatic breathing has been shown to reduce cortisol levels and activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for calming the body after stress.

When combined with counting, mindful breathing becomes a powerful tool to manage both body and mind.

According to recent findings published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, “Deep breathing exercises significantly lower heart rate and induce a state of calm through vagus nerve activation”.

The **vagus nerve** controls key functions like heart rate, breathing, and digestion, and stimulating it can help calm the body and reduce stress. This reinforces the value of coupling breath awareness with techniques like counting.

Power Tip

When you focus on breathing, you engage the vagus nerve, which helps slow your heart rate and reduce stress.

CBT Insight: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

In CBT, **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)** is a common technique that helps reduce anxiety by systematically tensing and relaxing muscle groups.

This technique, combined with mindful breathing, enhances emotional control by promoting bodily awareness and easing physical tension caused by stress.

As the pioneer of PMR, Edmund Jacobson, once said, “An anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body”.

Try this simple method:

- **Count your breaths:** With eyes closed, breathe normally, counting each exhalation up to ten.
- **Sync with your heartbeat:** Try breathing in rhythm with your heartbeat to promote deeper relaxation.
- **Muscle tightening and releasing:** Tighten a specific muscle group for ten seconds, then release. Repeat for various muscle groups.

Visualisation: Harnessing the Power of Imagination

Visualisation is another technique to enhance emotional regulation.

Studies in **positive psychology** have shown that imagining yourself in a calm, pleasant place can activate the same neural pathways associated with real-life experiences. This helps you disengage from stress and emotions more effectively.

To practice visualisation:

- Close your eyes.
- Imagine a place that makes you feel at peace (e.g. a beach, a forest).
- Focus on the sensory details—the warmth of the sun and the sound of the waves.

Power Tip

Combine visualisation with breathing exercises for even more significant stress relief.

How to apply these techniques in your life

1. **Count your breaths:** Focus on each exhalation, using it to centre your mind.
 2. **Use PMR:** Tense and relax muscle groups, helping your body release stress.
 3. **Visualise:** Imagine yourself in a calm space when stressed. This mental “escape” can be a powerful tool for self-regulation.
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Chapter 3

Alternative CBT Breathing Techniques

CBT Therapeutic Breathing Techniques explained

Breathing techniques are fundamental to CBT because they directly influence the nervous system, helping to regulate stress responses. Let's explore a few more advanced techniques adapted from CBT methodologies to manage anxiety effectively.

Box Breathing Technique

This technique helps create an immediate sense of calm by regulating your breath in equal counts. According to research, box breathing "stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, leading to lowered cortisol and anxiety levels".

1. **Inhale:** Breathe in deeply through your nose for a count of four.
2. **Hold:** Hold your breath for another count of four.
3. **Exhale:** Release the breath slowly for a count of four.
4. **Hold Again:** Pause after exhaling, holding the breath for a count of four.

Repeat this process for five minutes to immediately reduce anxiety.

4-7-8 Breathing Technique

Developed by Dr. Andrew Weil, this technique has been shown to promote relaxation and reduce stress.

1. **Inhale:** Breathe in quietly through your nose for four seconds.
2. **Hold:** Hold your breath for seven seconds.
3. **Exhale:** Slowly exhale through your mouth for eight seconds.

This technique helps regulate the body's fight-or-flight response, allowing the body to switch to a state of relaxation.

Diaphragmatic Breathing (Belly Breathing)

This technique focuses on breathing deeply into your diaphragm rather than shallow chest breathing, which can exacerbate anxiety.

1. **Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly.**
2. **Inhale:** Breathe deeply through your nose so your belly expands (not your chest).
3. **Exhale:** Slowly breathe out through pursed lips, pushing all the air out of your diaphragm.

This method is highly effective at reducing symptoms of anxiety and has been supported by recent research indicating its positive effects on emotional regulation.

Power Tip

Pair breathing techniques with visualisation

For enhanced effect, visualise a peaceful setting while practising these techniques. This can reinforce the relaxation response in your body, leading to more profound stress relief.



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Chapter 4

Bringing It All Together – Actionable Strategies for Personal Development

Key takeaways

The techniques described in the previous chapters are simple yet highly effective tools for managing stress, emotions, and negative behaviours.

Consider the following strategies to integrate these methods into your everyday life and habits.

1. Start with awareness

The first step is recognising when you're stressed, angry, or anxious. Pay attention to your emotional and physical cues. Are your muscles tense? Is your heart rate elevated?

These signs can act as a signal to use one of the techniques you've learned.

2. Choose the right technique for the moment

- If you're feeling overwhelmed, start by counting to ten.
- For more prolonged stress or anxiety, combine counting with **mindful breathing** or **progressive muscle relaxation**.
- If you're in a situation where you need a mental escape, practice **visualisation** to calm your mind.

3. Practice daily

Like any skill, emotional regulation techniques must be practised regularly to be effective.

Set aside a few minutes daily to practice mindful breathing, counting, or muscle relaxation—even when you're not stressed.

Checklist: implementing emotional control techniques

- ☐ **Awareness:** Identify triggers (e.g., when you feel tension, anger, or frustration).
 - ☐ **Counting to Ten:** Pause and count slowly to ten before reacting.
 - ☐ **Mindful breathing:** Practice slow, deep breaths – inhale for a count of four, hold your breath for a count of seven, and exhale for a count of eight.
 - ☐ **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Tense each muscle group for ten seconds, then release. Move from head to toe. Shake out that tension.
 - ☐ **Visualisation:** Create a mental image of a peaceful place to calm your mind during stressful moments.
 - ☐ **Reflection:** Reflect on how your emotional state improved after using the techniques.
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Conclusion

Mastering your emotions isn't only about removing stress or avoiding anger and anxiety – it's about responding to these emotions in a controlled, thoughtful way that has long-term benefits.

By practising techniques like counting to ten, mindful breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation and making them part of your daily routine, you can significantly improve your ability to handle stressful situations and make better decisions.

The methods outlined in this booklet are easy to implement, backed by neuroscience, and proven effective through years of cognitive-behavioural practice.

Begin with small, manageable steps and practice daily – before long, you'll notice a profound change in how you respond to life's challenges.

If you found this booklet's content useful, please check out www.detailmastery.org for similar resources and insights into human psychology and personal development.



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